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*Stars of David: Prominent Jews Talk about Being Jewish* by Abigail Pogrebin is the perfect antidote for anyone who experiences occasional insomnia. Divided into sixty-two mini chapters, each focused on a single person except for one that includes a married couple, this book introduces the reader to people who one would otherwise be unlikely to meet. It is, in addition to a great read, an expedition in literary voyeurism. What Jewish woman wouldn’t want to sip tea with Natalie Portman in her favorite cafe, sit in chambers with Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, or lounge around with Fran Drescher in her all-white Pacific Coast highway lair? For those who are not a fan of the *Nanny*, the conversation with Sarah Jessica Parker might be more intriguing. Then there are the men, many of whom one would have gladly brought home to mother had they not opted to marry non-Jewish women.

Pogrebin identifies as a journalist rather than a sociologist and reiterates the lack of sociological certainty that her book offers. Yet she manages to skillfully investigate the nexus between religion and ethnicity by looking at the way people define their Jewish identities and their relationships to Judaism. Moreover, her contribution to scholarship is uniquely significant because of its focus on those Jews who achieved the America dream to an extent that most immigrants and second-generation Americans never do. These are veritable stars covering nearly every field, from acting to fashion, from media to medicine, and everything in between. Yet most do not want to be known as Jewish first and foremost, rather they prefer to be acknowledged for their respective professional accomplishments, whether on the baseball field or on the silver screen.

The question that provides the framework for *Stars of David* is: how do these prominent Jews feel about their Jewish identities and how does it play out in their daily lives?
Pogrebin clearly states at the outset of her book that she did not emphasize the commonalities between the voices of her subjects, yet the persistent themes of intermarriage, decline in ritual observance, and a belief in Jews’ underdog status contributing to their ultimate success, are too powerful and pervasive to ignore. Although Pogrebin chooses not to analyze these themes, one cannot help but wonder about the relationship between success and, for example, intermarriage. Did those Jews who truly made it in American society somehow, perhaps unconsciously consider marrying “out” to be marrying “up,” too? Dustin Hoffman, Steven Spielberg, Kenneth Cole, Beverly Sills, Gene Wilder, Nora Ephron, Aaron Brown, Barry Levinson, Richard Dreyfuss, Mike Wallace, Shawn Green, Eliot Spitzer, and Norman Lear to name but a few, all intermarried. Something that Pogrebin might have pointed out had she been doing a sociological study is that none of those who intermarried, the majority of her interviewees, ceased to identify as Jewish.

What this reader found to be most compelling about *Stars of David* was, coincidentally, the same interview that had the most profound effect on the author. Her meeting with Leon Wieseltier, literary editor of the *New Republic*, produced perhaps one of the best quotes in the book: “I think the great historical failing of American Jewry is not the rate of intermarriage but its rate of illiteracy.” His utter rejection of an identity being authentically tied to ethnicity rather than Jewish education including Hebrew is heavy handed, for it essentially negates the Jewishness of people who identify as cultural Jews. Yet in many ways he accurately captures the consequences of living in a pluralistic society that welcomes Jews at the cost of Judaism. Since the rise of ethnic consciousness is the late 1960s, “…it is very possible in this country, where you are expected to be a hyphenated individual, for the non-American side of the hyphen—in this case the Jewish side—to be entirely an ethnic of tribal or biological sensation of belonging.” The vast majority of the interview subjects illustrate a Jewish sensibility tied to being funny, industrious, hating Hebrew school, or reactions to the Holocaust, but the few that discuss ritual and/or literacy offer hope that not only will Jews survive, but so will Judaism.
As a contemporary of Abigail Pogrebin, I applaud her effort and the exquisite sensitivity with which she approached her topic. As a feminist, however, I cannot help but wonder about the disproportionate number of men compared to women in *Stars of David*, forty-four to eighteen. While an argument may be made about American Jewish men’s success relative to women’s in the public arena, there is no such discussion between the covers. Without an explanation, or recognition at the very least, *Stars of David* has an overwhelming male bent to it. Although I was very glad indeed to read the chapters about women, the lack of parity suggests that the book would have been stronger still had it included only men or some rationale for the imbalance. That issue aside, this foray into contemporary ethnography about prominent American Jews is well worth reading, giving to friends, and adopting for undergraduate courses.